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Inside Washington



Cheaper and Better Intelligence Sought



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WASHINGTON — Without fanfare the prestigious Senate Appropriations Committee is taking a long, hard look at the agencies which conduct the Pentagon's far-flung and costly intelligence activities.

Last year, at the committee's urging Congress imposed a flat manpower ceiling — 133,000 employees — on those activities. Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird, recognizing the problems in his department's sprawling intelligence complex assigned Assistant Secretary Robert F. Froehle as coordinator.

Now the Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on defense is scheduling a couple of days of closed-door hearings to explore further economies. Congressional experts believe Froehle has at least been able to identify expenses assignable to gathering defense intelligence.

Major targets of the committee's interest are two little-known Defense Department agencies which together spend far

more than the often publicized Central Intelligence Agency. They are the Defense Intelligence Agency, DIA, and the National Security Agency, NSA.

NSA is the government's electronic spy-agency, specializing in cracking codes. Congressional critics wonder whether NSA has carried its activities to a point where much of the product is no longer worth the cost.

The Defense Intelligence Agency was originally established to coordinate intelligence activities of the separate military services. Critics claim that the coordinating agency has itself become a center of military bureaucracy.

BILLIONS AT STAKE — Overlapping responsibilities of CIA, Defense, and the State Department's intelligence bureau have periodically come under congressional criticism. That is one of the issues involved this time.

The Appropriations Committee is primarily interested, however, in the very large sums expended and the quality of the product not just in the possible duplications involved. The inquiry is being undertaken in connection with the committee's review of the annual defense appropriations bill.

The costs of many intelligence operations are classified, of course. For defense intelligence cost estimates, even when declassified, may be misleading because military personnel ostensibly assigned to other duties may actually be full or part-time intelligence operatives.

The costs of many intelligence operations have been more or less officially estimated at slightly under \$3 billion annually. That is substantially more than the \$500 million estimate which is usually used for the per year expenses of CIA.

The Senate committee is, therefore, hunting for economies in the agencies where most of the nation's intelligence dollars are

with a concern in the White House over the cost and operations of the intelligence community. President Nixon is reported to be considering a reorganization of intelligence activities.

The President and, more frequently, national security adviser Henry A. Kissinger are said to be dissatisfied with the quality of the intelligence which reaches them. They would like to improve the product, clarify the lines of responsibility, and cut costs.

They are said to be increasingly concerned that the career director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms, who doubles as boss of CIA, has no real power to coordinate all activities in his agency, Defense and State, though that was the concept when his job was created.

Helms himself, the first career man to head the Central Intelligence Agency, is highly regarded by the President. Even the critics of CIA in Congress applaud Helms for keeping his agency out of foreign policy decision making.

However, there has been increasing criticism of intelligence preparation for such operations as the empty-handed raid on the prison camp at Son Tay. More recently Kissinger was reported critical of the intelligence which let the South Vietnamese be quickly outnumbered and overwhelmed on their invasion of Laos.

As the United States seeks accommodation with the Soviet Union (and perhaps, China) on limiting strategic arms, and amid the continuing controversy over NATO and Warsaw Pact troop levels in Europe, the gathering of reliable intelligence can have a tremendous bearing on the making of wise national security judgments.

So while they may lack the headline potential of a bomb-and-dagger spy story, there is real interest here in the efforts by Congress and the White House to